



Triptych2

Cally Phillips



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Free Short Plays. (No lisp intended)

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THE TRUTH ABOUT HATS

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

An empty stage. Enter JENNA, a teenage girl. She wears a grey hat and carries what looks like a cardboard tube. She takes her time, puts her eye to the tube and looks through it, up at the sky. So she is oblivious when she is joined onstage by NATHAN. He is COOL. He wears a "jesters hat" with bells. He stands observing her for a time then speaks.

NATHAN: What'cha doing?

Jenna ignores him. He comes closer, pulls the tube down to his eye level and looks through the other end of it, repeating his question.

NATHAN: I said, what'cha doing?

Jenna pulls the tube away from him, looks at him sternly.

JENNA: Nothing.

An uncomfortable pause.

JENNA: What are you doing?

Nathan shrugs.

NATHAN: Nothing.

They stand, doing nothing together (but gazing out to the audience) for a time. Jenna looks up at the stars. Nathan looks up at the stars. Then he snatches the tube from her. Looks through it.

JENNA: Hey. Give it back.

NATHAN: Cool.

He looks back at Jenna.

NATHAN: D'you know their names? Big Dipper and all that?

JENNA: Some.

NATHAN: Go on then. Tell me. What's that one called?

Jenna looks uncertain.

JENNA: That's... erm..

NATHAN: You don't know!

There is a pause for a moment. He gives her back the tube.

JENNA: The names don't matter. Whatever names we give them it doesn't matter. They're still there. Shining.

NATHAN: Sailors used to chart their way by the stars. How could they do that if they didn't know the names?

JENNA: I give them names. My names. My stars - my names.

NATHAN: You mean you make it up?

JENNA: What do you think the sailors did?

Nathan points at a star (above the audience)

NATHAN:That one? What d'you call that one?

Jenna looks a bit embarrassed. Nathan softens.

NATHAN:Go on. Tell me. I'm interested. Really.

JENNA:Well. When I look at the stars, sometimes I imagine that there are people living on them, looking back at me. Different people. People who know.

NATHAN:Know what?

JENNA:Things.

NATHAN:Things like what?

JENNA:Like Truth. Honesty. Freedom. (a pause) See. That one. The bright one there.

NATHAN:The one shining really brightly?

JENNA:Yeah. I call it the star of truth. I imagine the people who live on it know all about truth. No hypocrisy, no doubt. Not like here. And they start off wise, they don't have to "grow up".

NATHAN:Little green men?

JENNA:No. People like you and me.

She looks at him long and hard.

JENNA:But better. (pause) I've got to go in now. (she proffers him the tube) You can keep that if you want.

Nathan shakes his head. Jenna exits. Nathan stays on the stage, looking at the sky for a time. He shakes his head.

NATHAN:I can't see it.

He takes a catapult from his pocket, loads it, aims - and knocks out a light, plunging himself into darkness.

SCENE TWO

PROJECTED ONTO THE BACK WALL IS THE MESSAGE:

A PROCESS OF ALIENATION IS NECESSARY TO ALL UNDERSTANDING.

Lights come up on a line of people, all of whom are wearing hats. Black hats. They are passing hats from one to the other, like some sort of factory procession, or physical mantra. They are HELP, HINDRANCE, HARMONY, YOUNG NAT, HYP AND THE BIG D. They are all involved in the chant: I know I am, I hope I can, I think I was, You say we're all the same.

At one stage in the hat transfer, YOUNG NAT swaps his black hat for a jester's hat with bells (similar to Nathan's in the previous scene) So that he still says "I know I am" while the others continue the mantra. Noticing the dissent, HYP at the front of the line, calls the action to a halt. She shrieks at Young Nat.

HYP:Where did you get that?

The Big D joins Hyp. The others line up, looking scared.

BIG D:You can't wear that.

Big D reaches to take the hat from Young Nat. He rushes to hide

behind the line. Hyp and Big D remove their hats. Hyp addresses the frightened line.

HYP:I know what you're thinking. You all think that his hat looks better than the ones you're wearing.

BIG D:Perhaps you think you can just take your hats off - like us?

HYP:You don't understand the responsibility.

BIG D:You think we like not wearing hats?

HYP:You think we wouldn't like to wear coloured hats with bells on them?

BIG D:It's for your own good.

HYP:It'll pay off in the end.

BIG D:You have any questions?

This question does not invite an answer. But Help half raises a nervous hand, then thinks better of it under Hyp's firm glare.

HYP:What? You have a question?

HARMONY:How do we learn if we don't ask questions?

Hyp completely ignores her.

HYP:You know the rules.

Help weakly puts her hand up.

HELP: Why do we have to wear black hats?

Big D laughs.

BIG D:If you haven't got it now, you never will.

A SIGN FLASHES ON THE BACK WALL:

THE PRESENT DAY WORLD CAN ONLY BE DESCRIBED TO PRESENT DAY PEOPLE IF IT IS DESCRIBED AS CAPABLE OF TRANSFORMATION.

Hyp dismisses the band, they march off the stage (Young Nat still concealed behind them) Hyp and The Big D remain behind.

HYP:We should ask ourselves - is truth a relative concept?

BIG D:We should ask ourselves - is relativity a truthful concept?

Into the middle of this enters Nathan looking confused. Wearing his jesters hat. He looks around him uncertainly.

NATHAN:Where am I? Are you my dream?

Hyp and The Big D look at him. Approach him. Friendly.

BIG D:That's a nice hat.

NATHAN:Thanks. I got it..

Hyp cuts him off.

HYP:D'you want to swap it?

Nathan shakes his head. The bells jingle.

BIG D:Sure?

NATHAN:What for?

HYP:Oh. We could offer you a lot of things you'd find very useful here. A COOL guy like you. But introductions first. You are?

NATHAN:Nathan.

HYP:Delighted to meet you Nathan. I'm..

BIG D:Hyp. And I'm..

HYP:The Big D.

Nathan laughs.

BIG D:What are you laughing at?

NATHAN:Sorry. It's just... (lowers his voice) He's not very BIG!

Hyp crosses to Nathan, puts her arm round him.

HYP:Ah, but you see Nathan. Things aren't always what they seem round here. You need friends in a place like this. We'll find you a hat that will help you fit right in. Big D'll keep you right. Okay?

Nathan reluctantly removes his hat. Big D takes him by the arm and leads him from the stage. As they leave we hear Nathan ask

NATHAN:Where is this place?

BIG D:Don't you know?

Nathan shakes his head. He notices there's no jingling of bells. He looks a bit sad about the fact.

NATHAN:No. My dream?

On the other side of the stage, Hyp has put on the hat, swings her head around till the bells jangle. Nathan looks back, a bit regretfully. Big D encourages him away.

BIG D:It's the Star of Truth. You'll love it here. Soon as we get you another hat to wear.

They exit, discussing hats.

Hyp is left on the stage. Takes off the hat, looks at it disdainfully. Throws it to the ground. Stamps on it. Laughs like a pantomime villain. Exits following Big D and Nathan.

Onto the empty stage creeps YOUNG NAT. He sees the hat. Picks it up. Puts it on. Shakes his head. Bells ring. He looks chuffed and exits.

A MESSAGE FLASHES ON THE BACK WALL:

I DON'T THINK THE TRADITIONAL FORM OF THEATRE MEANS ANYTHING ANY MORE.

SCENE THREE

Young Nat walks onto the stage - addresses the audience directly

YOUNG NAT:Hold onto your hats - here we go!

He exits.

Lights up to reveal the upstage "mantra" as before - hat exchanging. Nathan has joined the line in place of Young Nat. Hyp and The Big D leave the line. Inspect the troops. Big D sends the members of the line off to the hatboxes (distributed around the stage) to collect hats, during the ensuing speech.

BIG D:And for one hour each day you're allowed to put on a hat, with a brim, or a cap with a peak, of any colour you like, unless the day is raining in which case you have to put a woollen hat on. *The hat wearers are trying to follow Big D's instruction but confusion reigns. Only Nathan is left - standing in line on his own. Hyp calls proceedings to a halt.*

HYP:(addressing Nathan) Clear?

Before he has a chance to answer, Jenna enters. She looks at Nathan. He at her. They recognise each other.

NATHAN:What'cha doing here?

JENNA:Nothing. What are you doing here?

Nathan pushes her.

NATHAN:It's my dream.

Jenna stands her ground.

JENNA:I thought it was my dream.

Harmony pipes up from the background.

HARMONY:It could be both your dreams.

HELP:It used to be all our dreams.

Young Nat peeps out from the wings, beckons to Jenna who crosses to him.

YOUNG NAT:Maybe it's a nightmare.

Hindrance rushes to catch Young Nat, but he escapes. Jenna looks worried.

HINDRANCE:A nightmare. Don't be silly. Does it look like a nightmare.

Hindrance takes Jenna by the arm and leads her towards the group.

HINDRANCE:That's a nice hat.

BIG D:Look better in black. It's a bit.. grey.

Hyp proffers another hat to Jenna.

HYP:This one would really suit you.

Big D, Hindrance and Nathan all nod in agreement.

JENNA:Well..?

HINDRANCE:You know what they say?

Jenna shakes her head.

HINDRANCE:Don't put it off - put it on.

Hyp turns to the group.

HYP:Can't hear you.

GROUP:Don't put it off - put it on.

Jenna puts on the hat. Hindrance leads her to her place in the line. Hyp lines up in front of the group like a captain.

HYP>Welcome to the Star of Truth.

Jenna reaches up to take the hat off. She can't. It's fixed to her head. She looks alarmed. The "group" begins to file out.

JENNA:Where are we going?

Hindrance turns round to answer her.

HINDRANCE:To look for a little boy who's lost. Who needs help.
The Big D and Hyp stay behind, waving them off.

SIGN ON BACK WALL:

YOU MAY PERHAPS AGREE WITH ME THAT THE PRESENT DAY WORLD CAN DO WITH TRANSFORMING.

Alone on the stage, they fumble their way through a range of hats - trying them on, pulling faces, making jokes - improvising the mantra "I know I am" etc. Big D puts a Santa Hat on -

BIG D:You want to talk to me - you'd better see my helpers.
Big D and Hyp fall about laughing.

*Hindrance reappears, stands nervously watching the pair.
Hyp beckons Hindrance towards them.*

HYP:Good job Hindrance. We've got them just where we want them.

BIG D:Totally confused.

Hindrance smiles. Hyp waves at her.

HYP:Don't stand on ceremony. Take your hat off.
Hindrance gratefully removes her hat.

SCENE FOUR

Help leads The "Hats" onto the stage. They sit in a semi circle - Hindrance, Nathan, Jenna and Harmony.

Help addresses the audience directly.

HELP:If I can be of any help in explaining what this play is about.

Big D drags her away from the audience, frogmarches her into position in the semi-circle.

Hyp and the Big D begin lecturing them.

HYP:And these are the happiest days of your life.

BIG D:Don't talk to strangers - don't trust your friends.
Jenna whispers to Harmony.

JENNA:Did they say "don't trust your friends?"
Harmony nods.

JENNA:That can't be right.

BIG D:Pay attention please. How will you ever learn if you don't listen to your teachers?

HARMONY:How will we ever learn if we do?

HYP:And these are the happiest days of your life.

BIG D:No responsibility, no stress, no worries.

HYP:But be careful when you go out - it's for your own protection, there are evil people out there. People and things who'll mess with your head. That's why it's most important you never take your

hats off. Any questions?

Help puts her hand up. Hyp and Big D look annoyed.

HELP:But why do we have to wear black hats.

BIG D:If you haven't got it now you never will.

Jenna puts her hand up. Hyp ignores her.

Harmony rises and addresses the audience directly.

HARMONY:And what about the boy with the jesters hat? What's happened to him?

Jenna joins Harmony- amazed.

JENNA:How do you know what I'm thinking?

Harmony smiles at her. But Hyp responds.

HYP:He's dangerous. Keep away from him.

BIG D:He looks like a little kid, but he's evil. Don't play with him.

HYP:Don't even think about him.

HINDRANCE:And if we see him - Ignore him?

Big D laughs.

BIG D:No. If you see him. Catch him. And KILL HIM!!

Jenna looks shocked.

HYP:And bring us his hat.

BIG D:Split into teams. Seek him out. Leave no stone unturned.

Big D waves a coloured hat as a temptation.

BIG D:There's a prize for the one who finds him first!

The "hats" exit - Jenna and Harmony one side, Nathan, Help and Hindrance the other.

HYP:Do you know what they say?

BIG D:What?

Hyp mimes a scalping.

HYP:If you want to get a head - get a hat!

The pair fall about laughing.

SCENE FIVE

SIGN ON BACK WALL:

EVERY ART CONTRIBUTES TO THE GREATEST ART OF ALL - THE ART OF LIVING.

We hear bells. Young Nat enters the deserted stage, looking round for a place to hide. He looks in the large hatbox upstage centre, clambers into it and conceals himself.

Enter Nathan, with Help and Hindrance - arguing.

HINDRANCE:It's the right thing to do.

HELP:It's the wrong thing to do.

HINDRANCE:It's the best thing to do.

HELP:It's the worst thing to do.

NATHAN:(addressing the audience directly.) What should I do? Make up your minds. Help and Hindrance drag him back into the action.

HINDRANCE:It's the only thing to do.

HELP:It's your mind. You have to make it up.

HINDRANCE:Don't be silly. You just have to do what you're told.
Nathan motions them both to stop - they are doing his head in with their quarrelling. As they fall silent, we hear the jingling of bells as Young Nat shifts in the box.

Nathan, Help and Hindrance look round, trying to work out where the noise came from.

Hindrance points to the large box, sneaks towards it and beckons to Nathan to follow.

HELP:You don't have to do this Nathan.

HINDRANCE:You should always do what you're told. By people who don't wear hats. They know better. They only do it for your own good.

NATHAN:I don't... know..

HELP:It's not about hats Nathan. It's about..

HINDRANCE:Listen to me Nathan. Do as you're told. It'll pay off in the long run.

Hindrance knocks on the box.

Young Nat,pops out like a jack in the box.

He is wearing Nathan's hat.

NATHAN:He's wearing my hat.

YOUNG NAT:Of course I'm wearing my hat.

HELP:Don't you think he looks familiar?

They pull him from the box. Nathan looks at him for a while. The penny drops.

NATHAN:It's like he's me - but younger. I think..

HINDRANCE:Don't stand around scratching your head. Leave that to the one's who don't have to take off their hats to do it.

Young Nat proffers the hat to Nathan.

YOUNG NAT:D'you want your hat back?

Nathan looks to Help and Hindrance for support.

HINDRANCE:You don't want that hat - that hat's trouble. Hyp will give you the best hat in the world.

HELP:Which hat do you want to wear Nathan? Think for yourself..

Nathan is in a dilemma.

HINDRANCE:He stole your hat Nathan.

HELP:Who does he remind you of Nathan?

Nathan puts his hands up to his ears.

NATHAN:Stop it. Stop it.

They all freeze for a moment.

NATHAN:I'm in two minds about the whole thing now.

HINDRANCE:Two minds. One hat.

Young Nat rummages around in the hat box, brings out the jesters hat he was wearing in the first scene.

YOUNG NAT:If you don't want your hat back, d'you want to wear mine?

NATHAN:I used to have a hat like that.

He picks the hat up, looks at it longingly.

NATHAN:When I was... smaller. (pause) Are you my brother?

YOUNG NAT:Not exactly. Think again.

NATHAN:Are you? You can't be.. are you ME?

HELP:If the hat fits wear it!

Nathan puts on the hat - Hindrance rushes off the stage calling out:

HINDRANCE:You've done it now. You're for it now.

NATHAN:What now?

HELP:Don't worry. I've got a plan. But keep it under your hats for now.

Help exits in pursuit of Hindrance.

Young Nat takes Nathan by the arm.

YOUNG NAT:Two heads are better than one.

They return to the hatbox.

Enter Jemma and Harmony. They stand downstage, unaware of Nathan and Young Nat behind them. They look up at the sky (beyond the audience)

JENNA:I used to look up at the stars and imagine..

HARMONY:That there was a place with different people. People who know.

JENNA:How did you..?

HARMONY:I used to do the same thing.

JENNA:It's funny. There I was on earth, looking at the Star of Truth. Feeling alone. And all the time, there you were, looking back at me. But I don't understand. The people in charge here. The ones who don't wear the hats..

HARMONY:Hypocrisy and Doubt?

JENNA:Is that who..?

She has a flash of realisation.

HARMONY:You know the answer before you ask the question Jenna.

JENNA:You mean this isn't the Star of Truth.

HARMONY:Truth is the place where we meet ourselves face to face.

JENNA:Face to face.

They turn to face each other.

JENNA:So - You are..?

HARMONY: You.

JENNA: And I am..?

HARMONY: Me. Do you get it?

JENNA: But you know things.

HARMONY: You know things too. Right and wrong. Good and bad. You've just spent too much time in the wrong hat.

JENNA: So which hat should I wear?

HARMONY: Go on. Pick one. There's a whole pile over there.

Jenna and Harmony cross over to the pile of hats, then notice Nathan and Young Nat.

JENNA: (to Nathan) You're here.

JENNA: (to Young Nat) And.. you. I thought you were lost.

NATHAN: He found me.

They sit together amidst the hats, selecting.

SCENE SIX

SIGN ON BACK WALL:

BRECHT VERSUS SHAKESPEARE: THE CHALLENGE.

Hyp and Big D stand downstage.

HYP: Does the stage represent life, or is all the world a stage?

BIG D: Well?

HYP: Is it irrational to strive for reason in an irrational world? Or just unreasonable?

BIG D: It's absurd.

HYP: Exactly. (pause during which she looks at the hats all over the stage.) And why do you think they never tidy up after themselves?

BIG D: It's a stage they're going through.

They are interrupted by Hindrance running in at great speed.

HINDRANCE: It's all gone horribly wrong.

Big D smiles.

BIG D: That's great.

HINDRANCE: No, I mean. Wrong for us. They know.

HYP: Know what?

HINDRANCE: About.. about everything. (pause) They know your names.

HYP: I said it. I told you. She's no help at all.

BIG D: No what?

Hyp shrieks at the top of her voice.

HYP: HELP.

Help comes running onstage.

HELP: You want me?

BIG D: Of course we don't want you.

Help turns round and exits.

BIG D: And as for you. I don't know what's got into you.

Hindrance shrugs her shoulders.

HYP:I always said she was more of a help than a hindrance.

Hindrance begins to leave the stage. Hyp calls after her.

HYP:And where's your hat?

HINDRANCE:I lost it.

BIG D:I told you she'd lose her head if it wasn't screwed on.

Hindrance reaches up to her head, tests it out.

HINDRANCE:Is it?

Hyp and Big D approach Hindrance with a menacing air - and a balaclava - Hindrance runs offstage calling out.

HINDRANCE:Help. Help me. Help.

SCENE SEVEN

SIGN ON BACK WALL: THE STORY IS COMPOSED OF EPISODES, RE-ARRANGED TO ALLOW THE STORY-TELLERS IDEAS ABOUT MENS' LIFE TO FIND EXPRESSION.

Help leads on the group, they sit in a circle. Help stands in the middle of the circle and addresses the audience.

HELP:Is it time for a helpful explanation of all that's gone before. And all that is to come?

Help joins the circle comprising Nathan, Young Nat, Jenna and Harmony.

Enter Hindrance.

NATHAN:Look out. Here comes trouble.

Hindrance tries to join the circle.

HINDRANCE:No. I.. I want to be on your side.

JENNA:There's no sides here.

HINDRANCE:What do you mean?

NATHAN:What do you think?

Hindrance walks round the circle.. thinking.

HINDRANCE:Is it a quiz? A test?

HARMONY:There's no sides here. Just good and bad.

YOUNG NAT:And right and wrong.

Hindrance stops.

HINDRANCE:I get it. I get it. There's no sides here. Because it's a circle.

The others laugh and open the circle to admit Hindrance. They go into a huddle for a moment as Harmony explains the plan.

HARMONY:So that's the plan. Are we all agreed?

HELP:All of one mind?

ALL:Yeah.

They pull on their black hats, get up and leave the stage - Nathan, Jenna and Help on one side, Young Nat, Harmony and

Hindrance on the other.

SCENE EIGHT

SIGNS ON THE BACK WALL: FLASHING THE PREVIOUS MESSAGES IN ROTATION DURING THE SCENE.

Hyp and the Big D stand centrestage, looking in opposite directions. From each side of the stage comes a group - stage left Jenna, Nathan and Help approach Hyp while stage right Young Nat, Harmony and Hindrance approach Big D. The groups speak in unison (as if addressing a school teacher)

ALL: We're sorry we ran away. We're sorry we didn't listen to you. We're sorry.

Hyp and Big D speak to their respective groups in unison.

HYP/BIG D: It's too late to be sorry now.

The two groups form up into the a mirrored pattern of each other and begin the black hat mantra. Hyp and Big D watch, increasing pleasure spreading back over their faces. They feel in command once more.

HYP: Take more care. It's for your own good.

BIG D: If you haven't got it now you never will.

Hindrance breaks from the ranks, turns to face Help.

HINDRANCE: Now?

HELP: Now.

The groups all put on their coloured, individual cool hats (which they'd concealed) The groups take hold of Hyp and Big D respectively and place identical hats on their heads. At this, Hyp and Big D back away from the groups, struggling to remove the hats until they hit each other - centrestage. They both jump, turn and face each other- shocked.

JENNA: Truth is the place where you meet yourself face to face.

YOUNG NAT: It's time for you to learn from us.

Hyp and Big D sit down together. The pairs approach them in turn.

NATHAN: You don't understand us.

YOUNG NAT: You just tell us.

JENNA: You don't explain.

HARMONY: You just lecture.

HELP: You don't listen to us.

HINDRANCE: Not really listen.

NATHAN: You give us faulty tools.

YOUNG NAT: And expect us to build something that works.

JENNA: You tell us lies from the moment we're born.

HARMONY: You tell us to tell the truth - but where do we learn how to lie?

HYP:What lies?

BIG D:What lies?

HELP:Santa Claus.

HINDRANCE:The tooth fairy.

YOUNG NAT:Bad things won't happen.

NATHAN:And just when we start to believe you, you tell us..

JENNA:Bad things will happen. Don't talk to strangers.

HARMONY:Don't listen to your friends.

HELP:Eat it its good for you.

HINDRANCE>You'll grow out of it.

Hyp and Big D address the audience.

HYP>We tried. We did our best.

BIG D>We did it for your own good. We wanted to tell you the truth.

HYP:But sometimes the truth is too ugly.

JENNA:What do you know about truth?

NATHAN:You don't grow into it.

He puts a jesters hat on Hyp.

YOUNG NAT:You don't grow out of it.

He puts a jesters hat on Big D.

HARMONY:You can't take it on and off.

HELP:It's not fashion.

HINDRANCE:The world changes so fast these days.

ALL:(to the audience.) And you can't teach us any more.

They turn back to Hyp and Big D.

NATHAN:So listen to us for a change.

YOUNG NAT:It's not about how big you are.

JENNA:It's not about how much you know.

HARMONY:Truth is the place where you meet yourself face to face.

ALL:And that's the truth about hats.

They all get up, throw their hats to the floor and walk off, leaving Harmony downstage right and Jenna downstage left. They look up at the stars.

Enter Young Nat and Nathan from opposite sides of the stage. Jenna and Nathan mime out the actions from the beginning of the play.

YOUNG NAT:What'cha doing?

HARMONY:Nothing. What are you doing?

He shrugs.

YOUNG NAT:Nothing.

She turns to face him.

HARMONY:I had this really funny dream.

YOUNG NAT:Me too. Was it about hats?

HARMONY:Sort of.

YOUNG NAT:Me too.

HARMONY:I used to wear a hat.

YOUNG NAT:Me too.

YOUNG NAT:When I was bigger.

HARMONY:What happened to it?

YOUNG NAT:I grew out of it.

Enter Help and Hindrance. They stand centrestage to address the audience.

HELP/HINDRANCE:Do you need help understanding the moral?

Enter Hyp and Big D - the cast take their bows to the line

ALL:If you don't get it now you never will.

AND THE SIGN FLASHES ON THE WALL:

A PROCESS OF ALIENATION IS NECESSARY TO ALL UNDERSTANDING.

CURTAIN.

NOT ROCKET SCIENCE

SCENE ONE.

The set is somewhere between a dole office and a cheap game show. On the back wall is a large snakes and ladders board. In front, a row of plastic chairs.

ADMINISTRATOR: Welcome to citizenship 101. This is where you will learn all the rules, and a few of the cheats, of getting by in society.

He picks a young, blond man from the audience

ADMINISTRATOR: You sir. You have just thrown a six. You're going to be fast-tracked. You look exactly like the kind of chap we want in our society. Young, fit, handsome... no, no.. we're not only after the Ayran look here, don't complain.. all of you down there are still in contention. You all have an equal chance. An equal throw of the dice, I promise you. But sometimes, occasionally, we can see a man - or a woman, who just cries out to be fast-tracked.. and.. excuse me sir, what is your name?

PAUL: Paul.

ADMINISTRATOR: I have years of experience and let me tell you, this society is not for everyone. Talent will out you know, and something about you just oozes talent. Please, take your place on the stage with us. So. This is how it begins. Citizenship. Look and learn all you good people down there. It will be your turn up here soon enough.

PAUL: Is this a gameshow?

ADMINISTRATOR: A gameshow? What would possibly give you that idea?

PAUL: Just, you said I'd thrown a six. I thought..

ADMINISTRATOR: Rule one Paul. Don't think. Just do as you're told. Thinking is for much, much later down the line - once we've taught you what to think.

PAUL: Oh, okay.

ADMINISTRATOR: Come on young man. It's not rocket science. Just citizenship. It's easy. This is just an updated way of filling in forms. Interactive you know. Transparent. So that everyone can see we are non-discriminatory. You know. The new way. Are you ready?

PAUL: I guess so.

ADMINISTRATOR: That's good. Uncertainty. Uncertainty is a good place to start. Now. What is your job?

PAUL: Rocket scientist.

ADMINISTRATOR: Joke. No. Joking isn't good. Not till you know the rules. And we've only just started so you can't know them. Please don't pre-empt the rules.

PAUL:No, I am a rocket scientist. It's no joke.

Administrator appeals to the audience.

ADMINISTRATOR:You can say that again.

Cue cards held up for audience response.

ADMINISTRATOR: Okay. Let's get on. So you are a rocket scientist. But how about your personal life?

PAUL: What about it?

ADMINISTRATOR: Are you gay?

PAUL: What?

ADMINISTRATOR: Gay? A homosexual? A shirtlifter? A woofter?

PAUL: No.(pause) Surely you can't ask me a question like that. Not in public.

ADMINISTRATOR: Questioning the rules. Not good. And for your information I can ask you anything I like. You are being fast-tracked. There's no time for niceties here you know. Do you object? (doesn't give him time to respond) Do you want to go back down there, with them?

Paul looks confused.

ADMINISTRATOR: Because I have to tell you, young man. I don't recommend it.

He continues, to Paul, confidentially in a loud stage whisper, which of course carries on his microphone.

ADMINISTRATOR: To be honest with you, some of them don't stand a chance. However long they hang around at the back of the class. (louder) So. Let me ask you again. And take your time. Think carefully before you answer. The truth is what we need here. Don't think you'll get by by telling lies - that's a special training course in itself. At this stage you have to realise that a society not based on truth is a society without moral meaning. And morality.. is the name of the game. So... Paul... are you gay?

PAUL:No I'm not.

ADMINISTRATOR: Never had any feelings that way? No chance encounters in a public toilet perhaps. Wet dreams associated with a boy in a class above yours.. because that can be okay you know. It's a feature of the public school system...

PAUL: NO. Never. I'm not gay. Ask my girlfriend. She's sitting right there.

He points to a woman in the audience.

ADMINISTRATOR:Hmm. Girlfriend. And how old are you Paul?

PAUL: Twenty four.

ADMINISTRATOR: Girlfriend. Sure she's not your fiancée?

PAUL: No. She's my girlfriend.

ADMINISTRATOR: At twenty four you'd score higher if you were engaged. Doing you bit for society you know. Preparing to pro-create, as part of a respectable married couple. There are lots of fringe benefits you know. To child-rearing. Society's with you, every step of the way. (pause) She's not... (whispers) Pregnant by you is she? (louder) Because you won't stay fast-tracked if she is. We don't condone unmarried

couples in the fast-track system. Or at all in fact. Which might seem confusing initially, since so many marriages end in divorce. But think about it logically. At least once you've been married the lawyers stand a chance. And some of our finest citizens are lawyers. They help to make us the society we are.

PAUL: She's not pregnant. We've only been going out six weeks.

ADMINISTRATOR: So she's not a vital part of your being accepted? You could do without her.

PAUL: I suppose so. I hadn't thought about it. I just came along..

The administrator cuts him off.

ADMINISTRATOR: Correct answer. Of course it may not come to it. She may pull through on her own merits. She looks passable. Good childbearing hips, not too much up top. Tell me, what does she see in a rocket scientist?

Paul shrugs.

PAUL: I don't know.

ADMINISTRATOR: Let me rephrase that. What does she do?

PAUL: She's a dental nurse.

ADMINISTRATOR: Good. So she's not trying to get citizenship on her career choice. She'll be looking to fill out the marriage and motherhood section, with or without you. That should improve her chances. Especially if she's prepared to re-train, set up as a childcare worker... take a few extra kiddies in.. maybe a classroom assistant. Nothing too taxing. Breakfast clubs. After school clubs. Help them with their reading. Something like that suit her?

PAUL: I don't know. You'd have to ask her.

ADMINISTRATOR: Well. Let's leave that till later. See if she makes the grade. Let's get back to you.

A gong sounds.

ADMINISTRATOR: Well, that sign tells me that it's time to bring on the competition.

PAUL: I thought you said it wasn't a game?

ADMINISTRATOR: Life's a game. Don't you think? With rules. Which you learn to play by... now...

He looks out into the audience..

ADMINISTRATOR: Who shall we pick next...

He scans the rows... picks another young man.

ADMINISTRATOR: You sir. And may I say, what a nice suit... you've clearly made an effort and spent a lot of time and money on yourself... and your name is..?

DARREN: Darren.

ADMINISTRATOR: Ah. Darren. From the working classes would that be?

DARREN: I s'pose so.

ADMINISTRATOR: Don't be embarrassed. We are unbiased here. We need plenty of your sort in our society. Hearts of gold, good work ethic... now tell me Darren, what do you do?

DARREN: Footballer.

ADMINISTRATOR: Ladies and Gentlemen. Can I do this job, or can I do this job. I couldn't have picked better if it'd been a plant now, could I? A footballer. The greatest asset a modern society could have. (to Darren) You do play Premiere league?

DARREN:Yes.

ADMINISTRATOR: I thought so. I mean, lower league players couldn't afford a suit like that now could they. Talent will out. Now. You really are being fast-tracked. We can miss out the next question all together. Don't need to ask you if you're gay. You're a footballer. It's against the rules isn't it?

DARREN: Wha...?

ADMINISTRATOR:Of course it is. Footballers go with models. Come on. Tell me you are dating a model...

DARREN:We're married.

ADMINISTRATOR: Even better. Come on Paul, keep up here, Darren's only just come up on stage and already he's storming ahead. So much for rocket science eh?

PAUL: I don't see what...

ADMINISTRATOR: What you can do to influence things? Of course you don't. That would be cheating after all. And at this stage there are no cheats available. Later maybe. But not now. You have to play by the rules... isn't that right Darren.

DARREN:Yeah.

ADMINISTRATOR: Darren will know all about playing by the rules. And about legitimate fouling, diving in the area to get a penalty, appealing for handball, shirt tugging, and of course... the master of them all... the off-side rule.

Cue card is held up to remind the crowd to cheer. Which they do.

ADMINISTRATOR: Come on Paul. A chance to redeem yourself. Tell us about the off-side rule.

PAUL: What?

ADMINISTRATOR: The offside rule. In football. Come on young man, it's not rocket science. Okay it's difficult for females to understand, but you, a bright young man (theatrical pause) you're not a rugby man are you?

PAUL: No.

ADMINISTRATOR: Then come on. Answer the question. Get this right and you can skip over sections b through d and go straight onto question seven.

PAUL: The offside rule. (thinks) It's when the player furthest up the field doesn't start his run early enough... or.. something.. then he's

offside..

ADMINISTRATOR: I think we would expect a bit more accuracy from a man of your education... but if Darren says it will stand, we'll give it to you. Darren? What do you think? Ready to make a judgement? Play referee.

DARREN: Wha??

ADMINISTRATOR: The offside rule. Did he get it right?

DARREN: Well...

ADMINISTRATOR: I'm with you Darren. It wasn't eloquent but it was close enough. And you score extra points for being sociable. Helping along a fellow member of society. You can skip right onto question eight. Now Paul. Listen and learn. If a player starts a run from an offside position - that means that at the time he begins his run he is closer to the goalkeeper than the last defender - then he is in an offside position. Have you got that ?

PAUL: Yes. I think so.

ADMINISTRATOR: Good. More uncertainty. I can see that uncertainty is going to be your strong suit Paul. Keep it up. We'll fast track you despite yourself.

The Administrator ushers Paul and Darren to seats in front of screens. The men face the audience so we can't see the screens, only their reactions.

SCENE TWO

Darren and Paul alone in a dingy, fairly empty room, like some kind of waiting room. They sit in silence for a minute. They are unaware that behind them, the snakes and ladders board has become a large screen, which shows the audience what we can also see in real life - the effect of Big Brother.

PAUL: Do you know what we're meant to be doing in here?

Darren shakes his head.

DARREN: Waiting, innit mate?

PAUL: I guess so. Do you know how long for?

Darren shrugs.

PAUL: Do you think this is part of it?

DARREN: Part of what mate?

PAUL: The test. The Citizenship test.

DARREN: Oh. I thought it was just the interval.

PAUL: The what?

DARREN: You know. Of the game show.

PAUL: This is a gameshow?

DARREN: Yeah. Innit? Like, reality gameshow, yeah? You never watched it?

PAUL: I don't really watch much TV.

DARREN: Oh. What'cha do? Playstation?

Paul sounds shocked.

PAUL: No. I don't have time. With work..

DARREN: Yeah. What's that then?

PAUL: Rocket science.

DARREN: Yeah. Rocket science. What'cha do there then?

PAUL: Um.. science. To do with rockets. I'm working on trajectories really.

DARREN: Oh. Mmm. Never got into that meself. I just play football.

PAUL: A lot of training?

DARREN: Couple of hours a day. Four if there's a big match. No sex before a match the guv says. We don't listen to him. Never held me back. I'm a striker mate, and sex, well, it's like striking, innit?

PAUL: I never thought of it like that.

DARREN: Then you ain't doing it right.

There is an uncomfortable pause.

DARREN: Me and Tosh, we're the best strike partnership in the league.

PAUL: Tosh being your girlfriend?

Darren Laughs.

DARREN: You ain't up there with it mate, are you. Tosh is me strike partner.. my oppo. I goes up the centre and he crosses it over to me, wham bam, thank you ma'am.

PAUL: Do you think I should go and see what's happening?

DARREN: Nothing's happening.

PAUL: How'd you know that?

DARREN: It's the interval mate, nothing happens in the interval.. we all go and make tea while the adverts play..

Something clicks.

DARREN: Except... hey.. except in not rocket science they put the mugs in a room and you watch them while they don't know they're being watched... it's a hoot. Pick their noses, pick fights some of them... it's.. it's..

PAUL: A room like this one?

DARREN: Yeah. Spot on mate. Hey. We've been had! We're today's star plonkers...

He turns round and looks at himself on the big screen. Waves at himself like a small child, then effects mock football moves - overhead volley and the like. Paul gazes in disbelief at the screen.

PAUL: This is outrageous.

DARREN: Yeah, great innit. Now we got to talk. To each other. The one what wins the popular vote, he'll get through to the final. (pause) And no offence mate, that's gonna be me.

PAUL: And what's the prize?

DARREN: What?

PAUL: The prize? For winning?

DARREN: Oh. I dunno mate. Money I think. Can't remember. I'm not in it for the money. Me agent thought it would be a good, whatsit, publicity gig .But I gotta win. So..

PAUL:And how do you win?

DARREN: By being more popular than you. Which, no offence mate, ain't gonna be that hard. Now is it?

There is a long pause.

DARREN: Not unless they've packed the audience with Arsenal fans.

He looks at the big screen. Shouts out to it.

DARREN: Hey you Gunners. You out there?

There is no, or muted response.

DARREN: Sorted.

He tries again.

DARREN:Come on you Spurs.

There is no response. Darren begins to smell a rat.

DARREN: Chelse-e-e-a.

Again no response.

DARREN: Hey. Maybe there ain't anyone out there? What a facer eh?

PAUL: Maybe they just aren't football fans.

Darren considers it for a minute. It's clearly an unpalatable thought.

DARREN:Na. I know it'll be like one of them one way mirrors. They can see us but we can't see them. That's all. I'm still gonna win. Course I am. Lifted three league championships I did. Well, sub in one, but still counts. I'm a winner. That's who I am.

PAUL:Nice to be so confident.

DARREN: Well, no offence mate, but.. well, who's your common man gonna choose. Between a footballer and a rocket science guy. I mean. Who's more useful in society between them two eh?

Paul shakes his head.

PAUL:I guess I can't argue with you there.

DARREN: Come on mate. Don't just go belly up. Give me a run for me money. I gotta show I'm beating someone premier league. Not just knocking out a minnow in a qualifier.

PAUL:I'm sorry I don't know how.

DARREN: How what?

PAUL:How to.. compete.. in this kind of situation.

DARREN: Mate, this isn't a situation. This is life. Competition is natural.. you just do it.

PAUL:I don't. I just live.

DARREN: Well where's that gonna get you. No celebrity in hiding away just living is there. You've gotta do it in public. Live it large mate. That's what life's all about . Let 'em see who you are. Let 'em make you who they want you to be. Give 'em a hero. Someone to talk about.

He's exhausted from this long outburst.

PAUL: I don't think..

The lights go down on them.

SCENE THREE

Paul and Darren are back up on stage facing the administrator.

ADMINISTRATOR: Of course if you feel you have been unfairly treated..

PAUL: I didn't say that.. I just don't feel comfortable with all this.

ADMINISTRATOR: But that's good. You're not meant to feel comfortable.

You're a citizen in training. You should feel insecure. Where would we be if all the citizens felt like they'd got to the top of the ladder as soon as they hit square one eh? There'd be nothing to strive for. We have to make you feel much worse than uncomfortable before I can sign you off.

Paul points to Darren, swinging on his chair, oblivious.

PAUL: He seems fairly comfortable with the whole thing.

ADMINISTRATOR: Ah, there you are. Swings and roundabouts. No one's perfect eh? What he wins on the popularity, you make up for on the sensitivity. It's your middle class upbringing. It gives you a good edge sometimes you know. The inbred feeling of guilt. The feeling that somehow you don't quite fit in, whatever you do, you're never quite good enough. That's the beauty of the middle classes.

He gives a reflective pause.

ADMINISTRATOR: Of course, for sheer bottle and determination, we have to give that to the working classes. The ability to unquestioningly go out and be cannon fodder. To languish for years on the dole not realising that they are surplus to requirement. Happy to be sold down the river, to be made an example of. They'll happily rot away in prison - as long as you tell them they're hard. Tell them they're a menace to society, some of them, and they'll go along and be the model little citizens you want them to be. The example to burn fear into the hearts of the middle classes - the one's who could really do the damage.

PAUL: It all seems rather cynical.

The administrator ignores his comment and carries on.

ADMINISTRATOR: Between you and me, I don't really get on with them.. all that fighting to get a better life.. it's too tedious. Give me a man who realises that it's all out of his hands.. that's my real joy. You could be that man. Are you that man Paul?

Appeals to the audience.

ADMINISTRATOR: Is he that man?

Cue cards held up for applause.

ADMINISTRATOR: You see. You do have some supporters. (to Paul) Sadly they think they have some influence on the proceedings.(He sighs) It's the down side, sometimes. The real glory of power comes when those oppressed

realise they are being oppressed. But our society dictates that we have to make you all feel free. Waste of time in my opinion. Where's the fun in it? What's the point? Me, if I had my way, I'd let you all see the truth. The futility. But then, well, I've got my job to do.. like everyone. Maybe when I get a promotion..

PAUL: Can you explain this to me?

ADMINISTRATOR: Explanation isn't really part of the game. What are you unclear about?

PAUL: About.. about all of it.

ADMINISTRATOR: Correct answer. But if I can give you a tip, I'd stop demanding explanations. It won't win you any points.

PAUL: I wasn't demanding. Just asking.

ADMINISTRATOR: Don't come the semantics with me boy. Questioning, asking, demanding.. all of them an attempt to raise your position falsely by gaining knowledge. If you are to make it in citizenship 101 you will have to learn that you only learn what we want you to learn when we want you to learn it and be happy with that.

PAUL: I'm not sure I want to..

ADMINISTRATOR: Wrong answer. You don't have a choice any more.

PAUL: What?

ADMINISTRATOR: You gave up the right to choices when you signed the dotted line..

PAUL: I never signed anything.

ADMINISTRATOR: Figure of speech. The contract was established as soon as you stepped up on the stage. We gave you a bye - threw a six for you. You don't have a choice. You HAVE to play.

PAUL: But what is the game?

ADMINISTRATOR: The game... ah... the game...

Lights fade.

SCENE FOUR

When they come up again, we see a giant snakes and ladders board on the back wall.

DARREN: It's a game of two halves.

PAUL: Snakes and ladders?

ADMINISTRATOR: It's not rocket science.

Cue cards are held up for the audience to join in shouting "it's not rocket science"

ADMINISTRATOR: Throw six to start.

PAUL: What?

ADMINISTRATOR: Throw six to start. It's not hard now is it? Even Darren understands that concept? Been doing it since he was a kid, eh Darren?

DARREN: Wha..?

ADMINISTRATOR: Throw six to start. A game of chance.

DARREN: Oh. Okay.

He presses a button. We see a dice thrown on the wall screen. It comes down six. Audience applause. The counter moves along the board six places.

ADMINISTRATOR: Now you.

Paul presses his button. The dice rolls. It comes down six.

ADMINISTRATOR: Oh, bad luck.

PAUL: What do you mean, bad luck? It's a six.

ADMINISTRATOR: Yes, but you needed a double six to start.

PAUL: A double six.

ADMINISTRATOR: You went second so you need a double six.

PAUL: I...

ADMINISTRATOR: No.. don't start complaining. Those are the rules.

PAUL: You've just changed them.. you can't have one set of rules for one person and one for the other. That's not fair.

ADMINISTRATOR: Ah. Fair. Now who told you life was fair Paul eh? Try again. Throw double six to start.

PAUL: But there's only one dice.

Lights go down. They come up again on the game more advanced. Darren is about square 32, at the top of a ladder. Paul is at eleven, one square before a snake.

ADMINISTRATOR: Well done Darren. Now Paul. Your turn.

Paul presses the button and the dice rolls. His checker moves to the snake and then goes right down, back to square 7. Canned audience noises of approval.

PAUL: This is crazy.

ADMINISTRATOR: Not crazy at all. It's all been statistically analysed due to the answers you wrote down before you came up on stage.. on your application form..

PAUL: I don't remember filling out an application form.

ADMINISTRATOR: A questionnaire? Sent about five weeks ago, to your home?

PAUL: But that was about lifestyle choices.. about..

ADMINISTRATOR: Exactly. We are judging you on the answers you gave.

PAUL: But it was just a silly quiz. We filled it out together. As a joke. We were drunk.

ADMINISTRATOR: No such thing as a silly quiz Paul. All those insignificant little pieces of paper, bits of data, you give to us, in whatever form you do it. Shopping receipts, internet surfing, library books, magazine quizzes, census returns.. none of it is wasted you know. We build our profile from it.. and we're using your answers to influence your chances of success. Your attitude here is included and if you don't mind me saying so, it isn't helping your progress. Now, Darren. Your turn.

Darren presses the button. The dice rolls. He throws a four which takes him past the ladder, towards the mouth of another snake. He goes down to about 22.

DARREN: Ah, no.

ADMINISTRATOR: You see. Don't get too cocky. (To Paul) We can tell what you are thinking you know. You won't sneak that past us. Lucky for Darren, he can't hold a sustained thought in his head for more than a minute or two. So he'll be straight back up the next available ladder, inexorably progressing towards the main prize.

PAUL: So what's the point?

ADMINISTRATOR: What?

PAUL: If it's already decided that Darren will win, why are we even playing?

ADMINISTRATOR: Ritual humiliation.

PAUL: What?

ADMINISTRATOR: I have to warn you that on the three strikes rule, one more direct question and you will be disqualified.

PAUL: I don't think I care.

ADMINISTRATOR: Oh. You'll care. (pause) You didn't read the small print did you?

PAUL: I'm not aware of reading any print at all. Large or small.

ADMINISTRATOR: I'll let the sarcasm go, because you are clearly unaware of the situation you are in. Just let me advise you. You don't want to be disqualified.

PAUL: If it gets the game over. I mean. Ritual humiliation. What's..

ADMINISTRATOR: Careful.. Ritual humiliation seems to be your only way left to get on in the game. Just sit there and take it. It will be over soon enough. You started with too many cards stacked up against you so you have to battle uphill all the way. Show some staying power. Put up with the crap. It's the only way you'll get on in this society.

PAUL: I don't think I want to be a citizen in this society.

ADMINISTRATOR: You don't have a choice. You were born into it. You'll die in it. Sooner or later. (pause) The choice is yours. (pause) I advise you to settle down and throw the dice.

Paul presses the button, rolls the dice and throws six. Moves on.

ADMINISTRATOR: Well done. Good boy. Playing the game. Stopped trying to fight it. Stopped trying to make sense of it. Just playing. Now you're in with a chance.

Lights go down. As they come up again we see an incredible thing. Paul is on the top row, three squares from the end. Darren is at least eight squares behind him. The administrator addresses Darren.

ADMINISTRATOR: Are you disheartened?

DARREN: Course not.

ADMINISTRATOR: Good lad. You can see that he's three from the end and that you don't stand a chance, but are you downhearted. No. Are you complaining that the game's unfair. No. You just play on. Throw the dice Darren.

DARREN: It's his turn.

ADMINISTRATOR: Phenomenal, Darren. I offer you a cheat. A perfectly good cheat and you refuse to accept it. Move on three squares for that.

PAUL: Surely that's against the rules?

ADMINISTRATOR: What do you care? You're three squares from the end. Victory is in sight. What do the rules matter now eh? Roll the dice.

Paul rolls the dice. He rolls two. Which lands him on the mouth of the longest snake and puts him right back down to square two.

ADMINISTRATOR: Unlucky. (pause) Yet somehow... strangely predictable, no?

PAUL: Yes.

ADMINISTRATOR: You see. You agree with me. It is more fun when you realise you are being oppressed.

PAUL: More fun?

ADMINISTRATOR: More fun for me. You don't begrudge me that do you, surely?

Paul shrugs his shoulders.

ADMINISTRATOR: Sulking eh? He knows he's beaten so he's sulking. How's that?

Darren rolls the dice. He throws five and makes it first time to the winning square. Lights and noise and ticker tape all attest to his victory.

DARREN: Ha. Second place is for losers mate.

He doesn't seem to hold it against Paul though, and crosses to Paul's place and pats him roundly on the back.

PAUL: It's rigged. I refuse to get upset over something that's rigged.

ADMINISTRATOR: Acceptance would be more gracious. Think very carefully about how you accept this defeat Paul. Your attitude here will influence things profoundly.

PAUL: How? I lose. He wins. He gets citizenship. I don't. I go back to the audience. Back to my life. To being left alone again.

ADMINISTRATOR: Ah. But if you don't accept defeat graciously. If you question the game or the rules of the game, you may find you are back up here again next week. Against sterner competition. A pop star perhaps.. or a model.. now you wouldn't want that would you?

PAUL: No. Okay.

He crosses to Darren. Pats him on the shoulder.

PAUL: Well done Darren. The best man won.

DARREN: Cheers mate.

Paul makes to leave the stage, back to the audience. The administrator

stops him.

ADMINISTRATOR: No you don't.

PAUL: Sorry?

ADMINISTRATOR: You don't go back . There's no going back.

He points to a door backstage.

ADMINISTRATOR: You go out that way.

Cue audience laugh derisively.

ADMINISTRATOR: (to audience) And I bet he never even read the part which tells him where he's headed eh? But we know, don't we?

Cue card for audience response. "yes, we know."

Paul is now very nervous.

PAUL: What..? What is it..?

ADMINISTRATOR: Come on now Paul. Surely you can work it out. It's not rocket science. It's only a game.

The words "only a game" echo as Paul leaves the stage and the *Lights go down.*

LIFE'S A PIZZA

SCENE ONE - THE FAT FAMILY

The Fat family living room. Mr Sam Fat is sitting in front of the tv, reading his paper. Mrs Ursula Fat is getting the tv dinners ready offstage in the kitchen. Tom and Harry Fat are fighting over some game.

SAM FAT: Where's my tea?

URSULA FAT: I'm going as fast as I can. I can't fit it all in the microwave at once.

SAM FAT: Well hurry up. I'm hungry.

He settles down in front of the tv again.

TOM FAT: Did you see that pathetic wee runt Eddie was playing with at school?

HARRY FAT: Aye, blow at him and he'd fall over.

TOM FAT: **Push** him and he'd definitely fall over. (laughs)

URSULA FAT: (OFFSTAGE) I hope you've not been bullying the wee ones again at school?

TOM FAT: No mum.

HARRY FAT: No mum. Not us mum.

They whisper together

TOM FAT: I went to rob his dinner off him but he had salad in a tub.

HARRY FAT:(LAUGHS UNCONTROLLABLY) Salad!! For his dinner.. He's not worth bullying.

TOM FAT:Probably had a raw carrot for his play piece.

They laugh.

SAM FAT: Boys. Keep it down, I can't hear the telly.

Enter Eddie Fat with his new friend Billy Body.

EDDIE: Hi Dad. Hi Mum. Is it okay if my pal stays for his tea?

Sam Fat looks Billy up and down.

SAM FAT: Not much of a size, is he?(CALLS TO URSULA) We got enough for one more?

Ursula Fat comes in from the kitchen, sees Eddie and Billy

URSULA FAT: Always plenty to go round in the Fat family. Welcome to our home.

(to Eddie) What's your friends name?

EDDIE: Billy. Billy Body.

URSULA FAT: Well, hello Billy Body.

Tom and Harry mimic her.

TOM FAT: Hello Billy Body.

HARRY FAT: Hello Billy Body. (to themselves) What a stupid name. Billy Body.. (laugh)

TOM FAT :(TO HARRY) I don't call that a body!

Sam and Ursula talk to each other ignoring the boys.

SAM FAT: I hope this isn't going to hold dinner up, I'm starving.

URSULA FAT: Sam, stop complaining. Just be happy our Eddie's got a friend at last. He's not as popular as Tom and Harry, I've never been able to understand why. He's a good boy, a nice boy.

SAM FAT: Ha. Nice. Good. It's a dog eat dog world out there Ursula and Eddie's not got what it takes. Needs toughening up if you want my opinion. And speaking of dogs. I'm that hungry I could eat a scabby one. Where's my tea?

URSULA FAT: Okay. Okay. I'm onto it.

She is about to exit for the kitchen.

BILLY BODY: Mrs Fat. Is there anything I can do to help? Lay the table?

Ursula Fat laughs

URSULA FAT: Oh no Billy. Don't you worry. You're a guest. And we just eat on our laps here.

TOM FAT: Trough it down, quick as you can. That's the Fat family motto.

HARRY FAT: Don't let good food go to waste. Or bad food either.

Billy looks a bit confused.

EDDIE: Sorry, Billy, my family are a bit...

SAM: What? Are you ashamed of your family, Eddie?

EDDIE: No dad.

SAM:(TO BILLY) Not much of you is there? Are you sure you get three square meals a day?

TOM FAT: He eats salad dad. For his school dinner.

SAM FAT: Salad eh? Ah well, it takes all kinds to make a world.

URSULA FAT: (OFFSTAGE) It's ready. Come and get it.

TOM FAT: What is it mum? What's for our tea?

He runs off into the kitchen, followed at speed by Harry. They return with plates piled high

HARRY FAT: Pizza and chips. My favourite.

TOM FAT: Bet I can eat more chips than you.

SAM FAT: Hey, you boys. Where's mine?

TOM FAT: Get it yourself.

There is a deathly pause. he's been too cheeky. Mr Sam Fat looks really angry. He shouts.

SAM FAT: Don't you cheek me boy. While you live in my house you'll live by my rules. I work to put the food in your lap and you'll do as I say.. so GET ME MY TEA - NOW.

Tom leaves his plate behind and goes off into the kitchen. Harry helps himself to

some of Tom's chips in his absence. Eddie and Billy look on, speechless. Tom brings back Sam's plate.

SAM FAT: Thank you son. And we'll have no more of your cheek. Good manners cost nothing remember.

He begins to shovel in the food.

URSULA FAT: (OFFSTAGE) Come on Eddie, Billy, don't stand on ceremony here. Get it while it's hot.

Eddie and Billy leave to get their food.

TOM FAT: Hey, Harry, did you nick some of my chips?

HARRY FAT: Don't be daft.

TOM FAT: You did. I counted them.

HARRY FAT: Didn't.

They begin to fight over the chips.

SAM FAT: Will you boys just stop your fighting and eat your pizzas. For heaven's sakes. Why does every meal turn into a battle here?

Enter Ursula with her food.

URSULA FAT: They're growing boys, Sam, it's good to see they have such a healthy appetite.

SAM FAT: They're giving me heartburn with their fighting.

URSULA FAT: Hear that boys? Just calm down and let your dad eat in peace.

Enter Eddie and Billy. they have much less on their plates. Tom laughs at Billy.

TOM FAT: Are you Billy Body or Billy Bird?

HARRY FAT: You're not Billy Bodybuilder anyway are you?

URSULA FAT: Boys. Don't be rude. (to Billy) Is that all you want?

BILLY BODY: Yes thank you Mrs Fat.

URSULA FAT: And you Eddie? There's plenty for seconds if you want it?

EDDIE FAT: No mum. I'm fine. (to Billy) We always have pizza here. Or burgers. I prefer fish.

Luckily no one hears him. The family eat on.

URSULA FAT: Well, if you've finished, why don't you go out and play.

EDDIE FAT: Okay mum.

BILLY BODY: Thanks for the tea Mrs Fat.

They exit

URSULA FAT: And you two? Are you going out to play football?

TOM FAT: Na. We'll stay in and play computer games.

HARRY FAT: We don't want to play with wee runts like that.

SAM FAT: Then go play in your room. I'm watching the telly and I want time to let my tea settle.

The boys exit.

URSULA FAT: It's nice to see Eddie has a friend.

SAM FAT: I'm not so sure about that. I think that Billy Body could be a bad influence. Salad. Turning his nose up at second helpings... Is this really the kind of boy we want our Eddie mixing with? He's at that impressionable age.

URSULA FAT: Sooner or later you have to let them go. Let them make their own choices.

SAM FAT: Hmm. I suppose so. But I'm sure no good will come of it, you mark my words.

BLACKOUT

SCENE TWO - A WORK LIFE BALANCE

The office of "what's a widget" factory where Billy is undertaking his work experience. Freddy Sugar-Fat, the sales manager is showing Billy round. In the background the managers are working at their desks.

FREDDY: And this is the nerve centre of the "What's a Widget" operation. This is where the heads of all our departments work. We like to keep it open plan so that we can all share our ideas. We put great store in a work life balance here, so I'm going to give you the chance to spend time with each of our managers. What did you say your name was again?

BILLY: Billy. Billy Body.(pause) Excuse me Mr..

FREDDY: Call me Freddy. We don't stand on ceremony here. And people tend to have such stupid surnames anyway, don't you think? I mean, take me for example. Sugar-Fat.. how silly is that? Of course my relationship to the Fat family is how you got the placement here, but we don't need to dwell on that. We had Tom and Harry here last year, and, to be honest, they were a problem. I hope you won't be as troublesome.. what did you say your name was again?

BILLY: Billy Body.

FREDDY: Ah yes. Proves my point about the silly names doesn't it.

BILLY: Excuse me, Freddy.. what *is* a widget?

FREDDY: Ah,that, young man, is the journey of discovery you are about to embark upon. For many people a widget is as boring as a factory, and so it follows that a factory producing widgets must be.. anyway, suffice it to say that after a week here with our highly trained and motivated staff, I'm sure you too will look forward to a future in "What's a Widget" once you leave school. Now. Let me introduce you to the managers.

They cross to a desk where Chris Carb and Daisy Dairy are poring over documentation.

FREDDY: Chris, Daisy. Can I introduce our new work experience boy, what's your name again?

BILLY: Billy Body.

FREDDY: Ah yes, Billy Body. You'd think one could remember that – the irony after all. Barely big enough to call it a body really..

Chris shakes hands with Billy.

CHRIS CARB: Welcome aboard Billy. I'm Chris Carb, the admin manager. I make sure that all the paperwork's in order.. Assisted of course, very ably by Daisy here.

Daisy shakes hands with Billy.

DAISY DAIRY: I'm Daisy Dairy. PA. That's personal assistant.

FREDDY: And a very fine personal assistant she is too. (to Billy) You will note that she's always immaculately turned out. That hair, those nails (lowers his voice) I worry about her potentially obsessive nature, especially in the field of oral hygiene, but then we all have our little idiosyncracies don't we?

He is whisking Billy away from Chris and Daisy before Billy has finished speaking.

BILLY:(TO CHRIS) Excuse me, I was wondering if you could tell me what a widget is..

There's no time to hear the response as Freddy has taken Billy to the other side of the office where Victor Veg sits at his desk, crunching numbers.

FREDDY: And this is Victor. Our accountant. The heart of a successful business is its accounts department, I'm sure you'll agree. Victor, this is Billy..

VICTOR: Good morning. Victor Veg. How do you feel about numbers?

BILLY: Uh, I er, I don't really think about them much.

VICTOR: Oh, you should, you should. You'll find that numbers really are your friend. Numbers can really make it happen for you. You need numbers in a well balanced life. A lot of people ignore numbers. It's a mistake. Take my word for it.

FREDDY: You see, young man.. what's your name again? (doesn't give Billy time to respond) here at "What's a Widget" we are happy to impart useful advice on the work life balance. You will find your time here most useful, most useful I'm sure.

BILLY: Thank you. Uh, Mr Veg, I mean, Victor, I was wondering what a widget actually is?

VICTOR: That's not really for me to say young man. I just account for the widgets, what they are is not my concern.

FREDDY: No indeed. For that you will need to talk to our boffin, Pete. (to Chris) Where is Pete anyway?

CHRIS: He was coming in late this morning.

DAISY: A dentist's appointment. He has a very well developed sense of oral hygiene.

FREDDY:(TO BILLY) There's a romance there young man. An office romance. Many

bosses would frown on such a thing, but here at what's a widget we realise that romance is part of the work life balance and..

Enter Pete Protein the boffin.

FREDDY: Ah, here he is, the last man of our happy group, Peter Protein, What's a Widget's boffin.

Pete Protein looks a bit distracted. He wears a labcoat.

BILLY: Good morning Mr Protein.

FREDDY: Peter. Pete in fact. We don't stand on ceremony here..

Pete Protein distractedly shakes hands with Billy.

PETE: Morning. (to Victor) I have a lot to catch up on, what with missing forty seven minutes of thinking time and..

DAISY: How were things at the dentists?

PETE: Oh, fine, just the usual check up. You know, I take pretty good care of myself so..

DAISY: Yes, I only wish everyone was as rigorous as you about appointments.

PETE: I find that it pays off in the long run. A balanced approach is scientifically the best one to adopt. I think there is an old saying- all work and no play – and in fact like many old sayings, there is an element of science behind it.

VICTOR: Like an apple a day keeps the doctor away.

CHRIS: And slow and surely gets there in the end.

DAISY: And image is everything.

PETE: Exactly.

FREDDY: Okay, okay, time's money so can we get back to work. I'm going to leave you young man, what's your name again?

BILLY: Billy.

FREDDY: Of course it is. Well, Billy I'm going to leave you here with Pete, while I get on with the high level management.. I have a conference call.. we're working on a management buyout, a take-over if you will..(off he goes muttering)Enjoy your time here, and, if you can, I hope you will also be a productive member of our team. Once you find your niche, where you fit the balance..my piece of advice to you is, mix. Always mix with others for a well balanced life.

BILLY:Thank you.

He turns to Pete Protein.

PETE: So, what can we do with you? You look a bit small for a lab coat..

VICTOR: And he doesn't really understand the importance of numbers..

BILLY: There are a couple of things I'm not clear about.

PETE: What's that? An enquiring mind is the first sign of a good scientist.

CHRIS: Yes, yes, ask. The only way to get information is to ask questions, then

preferably write down the answers – in triplicate. Or at least in an orderly fashion.

DAISY: I agree. Order is most important. That and a good appearance. Personal hygiene..

BILLY: It's just that I'm not sure what Freddy's job is.

DAISY: Freddy, he's the sales manager.

BILLY: He's very..

CHRIS: Enthusiastic?

DAISY: Effusive?

VICTOR: Efficient?

PETE: Good at his job, isn't he?

BILLY: Yes, but..

PETE: You have a but?

CHRIS: You question our leader?

VICTOR: His methods?

DAISY: His approach?

BILLY: No, it's just.. I still don't really know what a widget it. Or what it does. What it's for.. uh, what the point of this whole operation is.

There is a long pause.

PETE: Ah, but that is precisely what you are here to find out now, isn't it? It would spoil the fun if we just told you now wouldn't it? So. Who would you like to sit with first? We are a happy team and we all work together in an open and transparent manner...

CHRIS: But the boy is right. He has to have a place to start from.

He gives Billy a huge manual.

CHRIS: Here. Read this, it's index linked

DAISY: And colour coded.

CHRIS: And it will give you all the data you need to begin your understanding of the "What's a Widget" Group.

BILLY: Oh.

CHRIS: It's very comprehensive.

BILLY: Yes. It does seem to be.

Pete comes and takes the manual from Billy

PETE: The boy needs a place to start.

CHRIS: At the beginning.

DAISY: And work his way through..

VICTOR: In an orderly fashion..

PETE: Maybe so, but he only has a week. Perhaps I can give him a little help to get him started. (to Billy) You want to know about What's a widget. Well, basically we

produce widgets that work on machines for processing.

BILLY: Processing?

DAISY: Yes. Processing.

CHRIS: Food processing.

VICTOR: Statistically you'll find that food is more appealing when it is processed.

DAISY: We can make the colours brighter and the textures more attractive.

BILLY: But I thought processed food was bad for you?

CHRIS: It's just mixing. And mixing is good. Here at What's a Widget our credo is – mix and process, for a good balance.

VICTOR: Statistically speaking our most popular product is.. can you guess what it is?

BILLY: Uh?

DAISY: Go on. Guess. Guess what our most popular product is.. the widget for..

BILLY: I don't know. I don't really know about processed food.

They all shake their heads.

PETE: So much to learn.

DAISY: Think Billy. It's colourful. It's attractive.

CHRIS: It combines all the food groups..

There is a pause

VICTOR: It's PIZZA.

BILLY: Pizza?

ALL: Yes, Pizza.

Enter Freddy at speed.

FREDDY: Did someone say Pizza?

BLACKOUT

SCENE THREE - SALAD OR PIZZA?

The playground. Tom, Harry and Sally are hanging around.

TOM: So what we gonna do today?

HARRY: Gang fight!

SALLY: Ooh yes, that sounds exciting. Let's do something really exciting.

TOM: Not sure I can be bothered.

HARRY: You want to turn into a lardy arse like dad? Come on, have some fun for once in your life.

SALLY: Yeah, go for the buzz.

TOM: Who's to fight? There aren't any other gangs.

HARRY: What about Eddie's pals?

TOM: Those saddo's. They're not worth the energy.

SALLY: It'll be a laugh.

HARRY: They are such nice, good kids. They need to be shown who's boss.

TOM: So what are we going to do?

SALLY: We'll give them a choice.

TOM: Those goody goodies, they'll always pick the right thing to do.

Harry flexes his muscles.

HARRY: Not if the choice is our way or no way.

Sally shrieks with excitement.

SALLY: Yes. Go the Fat boys.

They go off to plan their attack.

Enter four kids. They are the ingredients for a pizza, Teresa Tomato, Charlie Cheese, Dougie Dough and Mike Meat. They look like a nice enough bunch of kids – they'd make a really good salad.

TERESA: Did you finish the homework Mike?

MIKE: Yeah, it wasn't that hard once I got down to it.

TERESA: My uncle Victor, the accountant, he told me that maths is really an important subject.

MIKE: My uncle says that administration is kind of important too. So why don't we study that in school?

DOUGIE: Tom Fat was trying to copy off me. I told him that if he just got down and did it himself it'd be easier in the long run. He might even learn something.

MIKE: Yeah, if you're organised you can just get it over with and still have plenty time to play.

DOUGIE: But that's the Fat's for you. Always looking for the easy option.

CHARLIE: You're a fine one to talk, Dougie.

DOUGIE: What do you mean?

CHARLIE: Well, you tend to look for the easy way out.

DOUGIE: A short cut now and then doesn't hurt anyone.

MIKE: Careful Dougie, that sounds like Fat talk.

Enter Billy and Eddie.

EDDIE: Hi guys. This is my new pal, Billy.

MIKE: Hi Billy. Good to meet you.

BILLY: You too.

DOUGIE: So, Eddie. How're your brothers?

MIKE:(TO BILLY) Have you met his brothers?

BILLY: Yes. I had tea there last week.

CHARLIE: Tea with the Fats. I bet that was quite an experience.

Teresa takes Billy on one side.

TERESA: I've no time for them myself, Tom and Harry. Eddie is by far the nicest one of them. He's so different.

CHARLIE: Yeah, it's hard to believe they are brothers.

TERESA: I wouldn't be surprised if he was adopted.

CHARLIE: Yeah, not a Fat at all. I mean. Have you ever met a good Fat?

BILLY: He's been really nice to me since I moved here, that's for sure.

TERESA: Yeah, he's great.

CHARLIE: She fancies him you know!

TERESA: No I don't.

She blushes.

EDDIE: So. What's going on with you lot?

TERESA: Nothing. We were just waiting for you and Billy, thought maybe we could go to lunch together.

BILLY: What's on the menu?

CHARLIE: The choice is salad or Pizza.

EDDIE: Salad sounds good.

BILLY: Yeah.

Enter Tom, Harry and Sally, at speed, and loud. Tom and Harry crowd round Mike and Dougie.

TOM: Hi guys, what's going down?

DOUGIE: Just waiting for lunch.

HARRY: Yeah, Pizza eh, great. And chips.

MIKE: What kind of pizza is it?

TOM: Pepperoni. The best.

HARRY: Yeah.

EDDIE: Or salad. Don't forget there's a choice.

TERESA: And this is the salad queue.

TOM: That figures. Salad's for girls.

HARRY: Yeah. Salad's for girls. What'd you say Dougie.

DOUGIE: Uh, well, I don't know.. Pizza is tasty.

EDDIE: A chicken and brie salad in a ciabatta roll, you telling me that's not tasty? And better for you.

TOM: Listen to him. Even talks like a girl. Pizza. That's man food.

HARRY: Yeah. And it's good for you too. Pizza contains all the food groups. All in one handy serving so stop going on about what's not good for you, Eddie you loser.

CHARLIE: What do you mean Salad's for girls. Like we're some kind of feeble second rate people.

TERESA: Yeah. Girls can eat Pizza's too.

SALLY: Sure. Girls can do anything boys can do. And better. Don't let them put you down girls. Salad's for wimps and pizza will give you all the energy you need.. and it's cool too!

BILLY: I think that there's more energy in salad than pizza, and it's not so packed with sugar.

SALLY: What's wrong with sugar anyway, it gives you loads of energy. Look at me, I'm full of it.

EDDIE: You can say that again.

TOM: Okay, okay. So there you all are. Time to make a choice.

He pushes Eddie to one side.

TOM: Eddie's sad salad queue. Or here.

He stands on the other side of the stage.

TOM: The cool queue. Pizza

HARRY: And chips. I'm with you bro.

He joins his brother. Sally rushes over in between the two brothers.

SALLY: Which are you going to pick? Cool or lame? You've got to be one or the other.

Tom, Harry and Sally taunt the others as they make their choice. Eddie stands firm on the right. Billy is beside him. It becomes like a game, picking sides.

DOUGIE: It's a really hard choice isn't it? I could go either way.

TOM: Come on Dougie. You want to hang around with sad little wimps like them? Join the big boys.

Dougie goes over to Tom, Harry and Sally.

SALLY: And how about you Mike? You know, I've always thought you were really cool, and so strong.

Harry crosses to Mike, whispers in his ear.

HARRY: She really fancies you. She'll go out with you for sure if you come on our side.

Mike hesitates for a moment. then crosses to Tom and Harry.

EDDIE: What are you doing Mike?

MIKE: Come on Eddie, what do you expect me to do? I'm a red blooded male after all and Sally's a real laugh.

EDDIE: Yeah, for a while. Till the mood swings set in. Well, it's your funeral Mike.

MIKE: I'm playing football this afternoon, I need some energy.

HARRY: Yeah. Pizza. That's what you need, not some weedy old lettuce leaf.

TERESA: Salad isn't just lettuce you know.

TOM: Yeah, yeah, tell it to someone who cares.

HARRY: Okay. How about you Charlie? Gonna join the cool queue?

CHARLIE: I don't think so. I'm fine here. I like salad.

HARRY: Come with us and I'll give you a ride home on the back of my motorbike after school.

TOM: Yeah, what's Eddie gonna offer you? A skateboard?

HARRY: A scooter?

TOM: A tricycle!

HARRY: Come on. Take a risk for once in your life.

TOM: Live a little.

SALLY: You're only young once. Time to be sensible when you're middle aged.

Charlie looks uncertain. She finally cracks under the pressure.

CHARLIE:(TO EDDIE) Sorry Eddie. Nothing personal. But I've always wanted a shot on a motorbike.

She joins the cool queue.

TOM:(TO EDDIE) See. They can't resist us. What have you and your sad salad got offer them?

EDDIE: You're so stupid Tom. Don't you see. It's exactly the same ingredients in a salad as in a Pizza.

HARRY: Yeah, but we give it that added something extra. A bit of excitement. A bit of cool.

TOM: A bit of danger. Hey, Teresa, what about you?

TERESA: No. I'm staying with Eddie.

TOM: Hey, why stick with the boy when there's a man on offer?

TERESA: He's nice, he's kind and helpful.. not bossy and overbearing like you.

HARRY: Oooh.. miss goody two shoes.

TOM: Yeah, go and eat a banana goodie girl.

Sally crosses to Teresa.

SALLY: Come on. Join us. If you come, Eddie will too. And tomato is the most important ingredient in a pizza.

TERESA: Is it?

SALLY: Sure. And so much nicer. No pips, no squishy skin..

She links arms with Teresa and pulls her over to the pizza queue.

TOM: Ha ha. We win. You're the losers. Billy and Eddie, sad little salad boys.

EDDIE: You pair are the sad ones. Having to lie to people to get them to like you.

TOM: Come on Billy. Whose side are you on? Going to stick with sad Eddie all your life or come over here and have a good time.

HARRY: Yeah, we're here for a good time not a long time.

SALLY: Come join the party, Billy.

BILLY:(To audience)Which choice should I make?

EDDIE: Yeah, help him decide. Me or them?

BILLY: Give me five good reasons.

EDDIE: It's up to you. Salad or Pizza.

THIS IS THE END OF THE PLAY. IT IS FOLLOWED BY AN AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION WORKSHOP ON THE THEMES OF THE PLAY.

ABOUT

These three short plays have several things in common. They were all involved in workshop process. They come from the time when I was starting to try and experiment not just in the structure of my plays (as in the Triptych) but in the content and message and way of delivering that message. As such they are a presage of the advocacy drama work I carried out between 2003 and 2012.

The Truth About Hats was performed by a youth group at a One Act Play Festival. It was developed out of a series of workshops on identity. At core it's a tribute to Brecht.

Not Rocket Science was workshopped by 7:84 Theatre Company. It pays something of homage to Charlie and the Chocolate Factory - the dark side. Citizenship 101 shows that Life is the ultimate gameshow!

Life's a Pizza holds the honour of being the first play ever performed at the Scottish Parliament Building. It was a commissioned piece, part of my residency with West Lothian Youth Theatre and their Healthy Eating project. Again, the play was developed out of workshops.

About Cally Phillips

Triptych 2 is, if you like, the freebie that comes with Triptych - three plays by Cally Phillips first performed together over one weekend in March 2003. For more information....

Other plays by Cally Phillips

Advocacy work - Guerrilla Midgie Press..